



# Planting Mast-Producing Trees for Wildlife

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**P**reparing wildlife openings is the most common management strategy used by Alabama sportsmen and land managers to provide supplemental food sources to the wildlife on their properties. Openings of clovers and other small grains are planted every year to supplement the diets of deer, turkey, and many other game species. These wildlife openings require many hours of manpower to prepare and can be expensive depending on the size and number of plots planted. These openings are beneficial to wildlife on an

annual basis as they have to be replanted every year. Because of this, wildlife biologists are often asked for management strategies and techniques that benefit wildlife populations on a long-term basis while decreasing the annual cost and labor involved with preparation. The answer can be as simple as planting mast-producing trees on your property.

Mast-producing trees benefit a variety of wildlife species by providing food, shade, nesting habitat, and cover. Mast-producing trees include both soft and hard mast species. Examples of soft mast

species include wild plum, crab apple, and persimmon, while hard mast species include white oak, red oak, hickory, and sawtooth oak, just to name a few. Unlike food plots, mast-producing trees require little maintenance or cost after the initial expense of planting is covered. By combining a wildlife opening maintenance program with the planting of mast-producing trees, managers can cut annual costs while providing a variety of forage for the wildlife on their property. If your property does not have adequate mast-producing trees, this could be a beneficial option.

Prior to planting trees you should determine the type of soils you have in the areas to be planted. This can be accomplished through a simple soil test available through Auburn University at a minimal cost. Contact your local Extension office for instructions on collecting samples as well as collection boxes. After receiving the results, you must determine the species of trees that will best suit your soil types. Some species require well-drained loamy soils while others require only sufficient sunlight and moderate fertility. Site locations for soft mast species can include the edges of existing openings or small, out-of-the-way openings. Old agricultural fields are ideal sites for planting hard mast producers. Consult with your local forester or nursery on proper planting depth and spacing of your trees for optimal success.

By combining the planting of mast-producing trees with a food plot program, land managers can cut down on the costs and labor of planting openings while still supplying supplemental food sources to wildlife. After the initial costs of planting are over, mast-producing trees will provide years of forage and cover to many wildlife species with little maintenance or future cost to the manager. Unlike wildlife openings, both the wildlife and the wildlife manager will enjoy mast-producing trees for many generations to come.

For more information on planting mast-producing trees, contact your county Extension or Alabama Forestry Commission office, or Chris Jaworowski, Area Biologist, Lowndes Wildlife Management Area, 227 Ridgeland Farm Rd., Lowndesboro, AL 36752. ☎